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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA202, SECRETARY LEAVITT,S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MANAGUA202	2007-01-25 14:55	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000202

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STATE PASS HHS FOR SECRETARY LEAVITT AND OFFICE OF GLOBAL

HEALTH AFFAIRS (STEIGER AND CORREA-DE-ARAUJO),
MCA FOR AMBASSADOR DANILOVICH,
DEPT FOR WHA A/S SHANNON AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: SECRETARY LEAVITT,S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT
ORTEGA

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (C) Summary: On January 9, 2007, in a meeting at Sandinista Party Headquarters, the U.S. Presidential Delegation (Presdel), led by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Michael Leavitt, discussed with then

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President-elect Daniel Ortega a new regional health-care training initiative, Nicaragua's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA-N) program, debt forgiveness, the designation of Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States, and Ortega's campaign approach and political platform. President-elect Ortega said he was encouraged by his recent phone conversation with President Bush. He expressed interest in the health initiative and arranged for a meeting for the Secretary with the new Nicaraguan Minister of Health the

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following day. End Summary.

Shared Concerns over Health Care

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12. (SBU) Responding to then-President-elect Ortega's opening remark that his January 8, 2007 phone conversation with President Bush was pleasant and positive and that they had agreed to work together to combat poverty, Secretary Leavitt noted that the President asked him personally to convey his greetings to Ortega and to reiterate their shared commitment to eliminate poverty, address health needs, and foster economic freedom and well-being. The Secretary then offered greetings from the American people and expressed his particular commitment to work with Ortega and other Central American Government leaders to improve the health conditions of the region's citizenry - he shared the vision for a new regional health initiative, whose centerpiece will be a medical training center in Panama.

13. (SBU) The Secretary clarified that the health initiative arose from a meeting in June 2006 of Central American Ministers of Health, who expressed the need for a facility to train hundreds of health workers each year from the region, with an emphasis on nurses, technicians and community health workers from poor, rural areas. Once trained, the workers would return to their home areas to provide improved health care. By providing the training in the region, rather than abroad, health workers would be more likely to remain at home, explained the Secretary, who added that while in Nicaragua, he would meet with Heads of State and delegates from Central American nations to discuss the initiative. He noted that the next steps include drafting a Memorandum of Understanding with the participation of interested countries, visiting the countries to refine the details of the initiative, and then possibly formalizing the agreement in an official venue with the presence of Heads of State and Health Ministers.

14. (SBU) Appearing pleased with the news of the initiative, Ortega commented that health is a crucial sector for his Government and suggested the Secretary meet with the incoming Minister of Health, Maritza Quant, during his visit to discuss details. (Note: The Secretary met with Quant on January 10, 2007 septel.) Reiterating his desire to maintain good relations with the United States and lauding the health initiative as an example of the kind of cooperation he seeks, Ortega then inquired about the status of the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact in Nicaragua (MCC-N).

Mentioning that he had last visited MCC departments of Leon and Chinandega in September 2006, Ambassador Danilovich replied that the MCC-N program is on schedule and has disbursed about USD 5 million out of the \$175 million allocated. He attributed much of the MCC-N's success thus far to the program's strong, quality local team.

In Search of Additional Millennium Challenge Account Funds

15. (SBU) Ortega observed that Nicaragua could benefit from additional MCC funds, similar to the amount designated for El Salvador's MCA program. Asserting that Nicaragua offers the best conditions for an MCA program in the region, Ortega noted that additional funds would help further combat

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poverty, generate employment, build additional roads and highways, and mobilize the country's productive forces - including its agriculture and livestock sectors. Bolstering MCA-N would also help correct the existing "asymmetries" in CAFTA, enable Nicaraguans to comply with U.S. standards and increase their exports to the United States. Further, argued Ortega, increasing exports would make Nicaragua more prosperous and, in turn, would help stem the tide of Nicaraguan immigrants to the United States. Foreign Minister-designate Samuel Santos added that he had raised the idea of increasing the funding level for MCA-N during his recent meeting with Assistant Secretary Shannon in Washington. Ambassador Danilovich shared his interest in expanding the MCA program in Nicaragua, and reminded Ortega that participation in the program requires continued compliance with 18 eligibility indicators, and strong ("benchmark") performance during implementation.

Debt Forgiveness and the Costa Ricans

16. (SBU) Bayardo Arce, a former National Assembly Deputy who was not re-elected but is serving as one of Ortega's economic advisors, sought our assistance in convincing the Costa Rican Government to forgive bilateral Nicaraguan debt and to be supportive of efforts in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to forgive Nicaragua's debt. Assistant Secretary Shannon noted that we are actively engaged with the Costa Ricans and other countries concerning Nicaragua's debt with the IDB and encourage them to vote in favor of debt forgiveness for the region's poorest countries. Shannon responded that he would follow up on the matter. After the Secretary voiced his appreciation for Arce's "straight

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agenda," Arce jested that "this is the American style."

Arturo Cruz Designated Ambassador to the United States

17. (C) The Ambassador noted he had heard Arturo Cruz, Jr. could be Nicaragua's candidate to serve as Ambassador to the United States, and added Cruz would be a good man for Washington and someone with whom we could work well. Ortega confirmed the designation. (Comment: Overall, Cruz would be a good match, although given his closeness to the United States, the Sandinistas are likely to watch him closely, and his job will be difficult. Before the start of the bilat, Cruz almost instinctively sat on our side of the table until we gently reminded him that he was incorrectly positioned. A political analyst, Cruz lived in the United States for years and has served as a consultant to Salvadoran President Tony Saca. We will meet with Cruz within the next few days to discuss the agreement process and bilateral concerns and priorities.)

Secretary and Ortega Share Election Campaign Experiences

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¶8. (SBU) Referring to his three successful campaigns for Governor of Utah, the Secretary highlighted the importance of his own wife's backing during the campaign and added he had heard Ortega's wife had played a significant role in the success of Ortega's presidential race. Ortega acknowledged Rosario Murrillo's support and noted she is a poet and a creative intellectual who set the tone of the campaign platform and crafted its slogan of "work, peace, and reconciliation," in an effort to heal both "internal and external wounds." According to Ortega, the campaign this time was different because of this approach; in most cases, he said, people were more tolerant and less confrontational than in previous elections. While at first he encountered some resistance in the Sandinista political party base, whose members were accustomed to a more adversarial campaign, Ortega explained that most of his supporters came around to the new approach.

¶9. (SBU) In Ortega's view, his message of reconciliation served to calm the fears of many of those who opposed him in the past, and pointed to accords he had reached with some of them before the election (probably referring to retired

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Cardinal Obando y Bravo and former Contra Salvador Talavera, who, while he won on the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) ticket, signed a pre-election "peace and reconciliation" agreement with Ortega). Further, since his electoral victory, a number of others who opposed him have sought rapprochement and inclusion, he claimed. Ortega assured the Secretary he intends to continue his approach of

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reconciliation and to include all Nicaraguans, regardless of a person's ideology or social position.

Rosario Speaks Up

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¶10. (SBU) Expanding on Ortega's observations, Rosario Murillo commented that, as revolutionaries, the Sandinistas must transform the conscience of the people and Nicaragua's political culture. Nicaraguans are tired of conflict and desire solidarity and reconciliation in a society "in synch with the soul of the people" and where love and affection predominate, she said. She explained that the FSLN campaign slogan "United, Nicaragua triumphs," reflects this sentiment, as the new government will seek to use Nicaragua's diversity to unite its people.

¶11. (SBU) In closing, the Secretary conveyed his appreciation for the opportunity to share such a historic moment in Nicaragua's history and reiterated our commitment to democracy, economic and political freedom, and the Nicaraguan people.

¶12. (C) Participants:

FSLN Participants:
Daniel Ortega, President-elect
Rosario Murillo, Chief of Staff and Ortega spouse
Samuel Santos, Foreign Minister-designate
Bayardo Arce, outgoing National Assembly Deputy
Arturo Cruz, designated Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States
Muhamad Muhktar Muhamad Lashtar, note taker (incoming PARLACEN alternate for FSLN. He is a former Libyan intelligence chief assigned to Nicaragua who has since become a Nicaraguan citizen. His presence created a strong "undertow" that belied the overall cordial and collegial tone of the meeting.)

U.S.:
Secretary Michael Leavitt

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MCC CEO John Danilovich

Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon

Ambassador Paul Trivelli

DCM Peter Brennan

HHS Special Assistant to the Secretary for International
Affairs William Steiger

Political Counselor Victoria Alvarado (notetaker)

¶13. (U) This cable was cleared by Secretary Leavitt, MCC
Danilovich, and A/S Shannon.

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